



June 25, 2001

Ms. Whitney Rick
Chief of the Research and Promotion Staff
Cotton Program, USDA
Agricultural Marketing Service
P O Box 96456
Washington, D. C. 20090-6456

Dear Ms. Rick:

Pursuant to the Federal Register Notice (Vol 64, No 242 P 70682) of March 26, 2001, I am writing on behalf of the Texas Farmers Union to recommend the Secretary of Agriculture hold a referendum concerning the continuation of amendments to the Cotton Research and Promotion Order.

As you know, the cotton checkoff program was initiated in 1966 to provide for the development of an industry-wide research and promotion effort. It is the oldest checkoff program collecting approximately \$60 million annually. Undoubtedly, there have been problems with the cotton checkoff program in the past. One patent example is the discovery of funds not going towards research and promotion, but rather to black tie lobbying events. While changes have occurred in the checkoff program to make the cotton checkoff more transparent and accountable; nevertheless, it remains a controversial issue. Cotton producers strongly contend that they ultimately should determine whether or not to continue the cotton checkoff program.

Specifically, I am concerned about the amendment to the Cotton and Research Promotion Act that terminated the right of a producer to demand a refund of assessments. Indeed, there are producers who support the cotton program, however, for those producers who do not believe they have benefited from the program, they should have the option to receive a refund.

Additionally, I convey the strong sentiment among producers in my state for a voluntary, not mandatory, cotton checkoff program

The prerequisite that the secretary of Agriculture needs to ascertain whether or not to hold a referendum is redundant. Checkoff programs were designed to benefit producers. Based upon this premise, I believe the continuation for or amendments to the cotton checkoff program (or any checkoff program) should be determined by a referendum in which active producers voice their position by their vote.

Sincerely,

Wes Sims, President
Texas Farmers Union